

A Sociologist in Eden

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IN GEORGIA, about a hundred miles south of Atlanta, is a plantation region to which, in one or two fugitive sketches, I once made bold to apply the name of Eden. There were two reasons why this name suggested itself.

One was the nature of the country itself. The climate is mild and ingratiating. Winter there is hardly more rigorous than the autumn of the upland country which ends about at Atlanta. Field crops and flowers grow the year long. With a little luck one can have fresh vegetables from his own garden for a Christmas dinner in Eden, and without fail he can have narcissus and the rich blooms of *camellia japonica*. Summers are hot, but the heat is moderated by airs from the coast, and drouths are rare. The land is fertile, and the planters do not seem to abuse its great productivity. The crops are cotton, of course, and much besides — the cereals, especially corn and wheat; peaches, pecans, peanuts; vegetables in trucking quantities, asparagus, sweet and Irish potatoes, cabbage and collards, turnips, peppers; sugar cane and sorghum cane; and other things in abundance, though grass and hay do not flourish as well as in the uplands. There is still good hunting. There is still good timber. And it is a beautiful land, a land of long-leaf pines and water-oaks and red earth beneath skies of ever-changing color. And the people are the best of all. Like Cousin Roderick and Sister Caroline (in whom

I once attempted to epitomize their qualities) they have the graciousness and repose of the old Southern tradition without the pretentiousness that came to characterize some of its later stages. They have nothing to do with the "moonlight and magnolias" tradition of cheap movies and anti-Southern propaganda. In short, they represent the better side, at once homely and fine, of the plantation South, miraculously preserved from the General Shermans of the eighteen-sixties and the nineteen-thirties. Last, in nothing do they seem more admirable than in their relations with the Negroes, who here outnumber white people nearly three to one. The old master-slave relation, in this land of Eden, seems to have developed here into nothing so alarming as, say, in Arkansas. The old feeling of white responsibility and of black loyalty and devotion seems to have carried over, partially at least, into the modern régime, and one would think this the last place to which the agitator and reformer would ever have the impulse to penetrate.

Such were the impressions I gained from a residence of about ten months in this country just at the time when Hoover was going out and Roosevelt was coming in. I did not, of course, make a "survey". I passed out no questionnaire sheets. But I heard much with my own ears and saw much with my own eyes. It was what any normal person could not help hearing and seeing informally, upon being made almost a member of the family and invited to feel perfectly at home. It would have seemed a violation to "write up" this Eden as places get written up nowadays, and so, when in the course of certain attempts at regional comparisons I referred to it, I veiled its identity and

location, for I wanted to save the region and the individuals in it from even the small portion of the curse of modern publicity that might — it was just possible — come from an obscure essay. That was the second reason for calling this country an Eden.

But how vain was my concern, how feeble my conception of the all-seeing eye of sociology! I now discover that the wise serpent, the Light-Bringer himself, was in that region before and after my visit, not for purposes of temptation so much as to focus upon Eden the central blaze of a high-powered social-scientific investigation.

The results — with statistical tables, photographic illustrations, maps, prefaces, foreword, introduction, text, conclusion, and index — are now available to the world in a 400-page book, *Preface to Peasantry*,* by Arthur Raper, Research and Field Secretary of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. From a complicated statement in the preface one gathers that the book grew out of a doctoral dissertation which was expanded to fit a larger scheme for study of the Negro in industry and agriculture. The committee in charge of this scheme were as follows: Will W. Alexander, who has just been appointed by President Roosevelt to replace Rexford G. Tugwell in the resettlement administration; Edwin R. Embree of the Rosenwald Foundation; Charles S. Johnson, professor of sociology at Fisk University. Although the preface does not say so, the book ties up, at least unofficially, with the line of research which has been fol-

* PREFACE TO PEASANTRY: A TALE OF TWO BLACK BELT COUNTIES by *Arthur F. Raper* (UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS. 423 pp. \$3.50).

lowed out for some years under the auspices of the Social Research Council and under the immediate administration of a Southern Regional Committee. Howard Odum's *The Southern Regions of the United States*, Rupert Vance's *Human Geography of the South*, Kendrick and Arnett's *The South Looks at Its Past* are examples of how useful this general line of study has been.

This setting will serve to identify Mr. Raper as one of the younger group of Southern sociologists and economists whose leadership seems to be in the direction of the University of North Carolina. Upon an elaborate foundation of research these men are shaping up a heaven-towering superstructure of social reform. The indication, in *Southern Regions*, is that the reform is eventually to be carried out under two six-year plans, administered by a regional planning board modelled after the TVA.

But Mr. Raper's part in such projects is rather special, and I am none too certain that, in a strict sense, he belongs in the array mentioned above. He is interested in the race problem above everything else. His first book, *The Tragedy of Lynching*, is a detailed case study of about a dozen lynchings. In this book the case studies are as circumstantial and dispassionate as one could ask for social science to be, but they are preceded by a lengthy introduction which contains as much hysteria as science. One discovers by reading the introduction that Mr. Raper is not much interested, as sociologist, in the *mores* which he has been at such pains to record. All that he wants to do is to stop lynching by any means whatsoever. But with all this passionate concern, he seems to have no

condemnation for the crimes which, in the South, are sometimes punished by the spectacular and brutal lynching process, and apparently he is not much worked up over what happens (though it is often terrible beyond description) to the victims of the criminal. It is the method of punishment that engages his complete attention and converts him into an advocate. He is shocked at the mob who with reciprocal savagery burn the Negro rapist to death; he is perfectly calm if the reciprocal savagery takes place by judicial process, and the rapist is burned to death in an electric chair before a few quaking witnesses, physicians, and newspapermen. Sociology is queer; it is moved by some things and unmoved by other things. But the point is, sociology is hardly entitled to use the literary word, *tragedy*, unless it is prepared to be catholic in its emotions. But it would be more correctly scientific, I am sure, if it were moved by nothing and could remain perfectly matter-of-fact. I find this partiality a little odd, but I can guess at one possible explanation. It has something to do with the fact that Mr. Raper turns his investigation in his new book upon two counties, in one of which there has not been a lynching for twenty-five years, in the other for fifteen years. (The figures are his own.)

But these introductory marks should be taken partly by way of contrast. Mr. Raper's new book is far, far pleasanter reading, even with some dark passages, than his earlier one. It suggests to me that some of the Southern sociologists who are interested in the Negro may have decided that their old approach is not valid or will not get results. They are now centering their attention on the economic position of the

Negro, and, since that is not to be separated from the economic position of the South as a whole, they have become concerned with the tenant problem and, beyond that, with the general agrarian problem. This is a wise step, if by such means they can bring the special race problem into the perspective where it belongs. The method will get results unobtainable by force bills, interracial committees, and horatory propaganda.

The thesis of *Preface to Peasantry*, as stated in W. W. Alexander's foreword, is that the old cotton kingdom of the Southeast is well on the way to collapse. Its soil has been exhausted by misuse of the land — a misuse due, Mr. Raper claims, to the plantation system, as a system, and to no other cause. Even before the boll weevil came, we are told, the Southeast was losing in competition with newer cotton regions, since it had to spend too much money on fertilizer. Then the boll weevil put the final ruinous touches. In the "collapse" of the cotton culture, everybody has gone down, but the Negro and the landless white tenants have gone down farthest of all, because, where life was getting precarious for everybody, no special attention could be spared to the least fortunate. The solution, Mr. Alexander says (and Mr. Raper in greater detail affirms this), is a restoration of the land through diversified farming, and a rehabilitation of the people based upon a new land policy which will afford "an opportunity for ownership of the land by the man *who works it*". (The italics are Mr. Alexander's.) The frontispiece of the book is a photograph of two cotton wagons on a Georgia road. Underneath it is the following caption: "The Black

Belt's riddle — To whom does this cotton belong: to the tenant farmer who grew it, to the landlord who furnished the tenant, or to the banker who financed the landlord?"

In his presentation of this thesis, Mr. Raper confines himself to a survey of two Georgia counties. One of these, Greene County, lies slightly southeast of Atlanta, in the lower Piedmont region not far from the South Carolina line. Its history, as an older plantation region settled in Revolutionary times, is apparently one of progressive ruination ever since the Sixties, when it must have suffered somewhat as did the "Tara" region of Miss Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. I know nothing at firsthand of Greene County, and therefore shall not discuss it here. But Macon County, Mr. Raper's other example, is the county I know as a land of Eden. It is "younger" by some fifty years than Greene County, and to this fact alone Mr. Raper seems to ascribe its sociological misbehavior in failing to decay quite as rapidly as Greene County. The plantation system, he explains, has not yet had time to destroy itself in Macon County. But he has little doubt that it will do so, and that soon. A glance through his sociological microscope shows the decay germs already busily gnawing.

What differences are there between the (doubtless) inferior alchemical pottering of a humanistic, or literary, interpretation of Eden and the (surely) superior interpretative method of the trained social scientist? It will be most interesting, I tell myself as I begin this book, to see what the sociologist has to say about a region somewhat closer than the Fiji Islands.

It is all in the neatest possible order: geographic,

historic, and social factors; annual cash income, per family; housing and sanitation; size of holdings in relation to fertility of soil; forms of tenancy; school-houses; lodges; Federal relief; and so on. Some of it is only an extension of what one can find in various other books; but some of it, particularly the detail, is new.

But as one goes from humanism to sociology, something happens that is like what happened to the unfortunate young man in Tennyson's "Locksley Hall": "The individual withers, and the world is more and more." Where are Cousin Roderick and Sister Caroline and all their kin and friends? Where are the black individuals, surely also individuals: the grinning E Pluribus, well-named, one of many of Uncle Amos's numerous progeny; Emmett, who could "read" the passion flower and show you, in a sprig of vine with a single bloom, Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Apostles on the road to Calvary; "Preacher", who was trusted with curing the meat; Tom, the gifted of tongue, who beguiled his landlord (who happened to be a landlady) into buying him a mule, and then into lumber to make a stall for the said mule, and next into share-cropping a bit of land which had been intended for horticulture or floriculture, not for cotton? All these notable people have gone down in ruins with the cotton economy and become statistical items lumped indistinguishably with the notable and unnotable in tables and summaries. Macon County has become a type and stopped being a beloved place to which men cling with more than rational attachment. And though everybody except the sociologist knows that X's plantation is not to be men-

tioned in the same breath as Y's, there is nothing here to tell the difference. Negroes are wage-hands, croppers, renters, or owners. Familiar landmarks have disappeared. One would never know that this is Macon County. It might as well be Zero County, where a man needs a map to get about, and where anything you say (I warn you, this is the law), no matter how carelessly dropped, will be used against you.

This is of course the defect of sociology. It cannot examine human ways without indulging in abstractions which to the lay reader seem to dehumanize. But this paper is not an attack upon sociology in its rightful capacity. There is no use in raising objections to a useful science as long as its practitioners pursue science, not history, literature, or religion. At the same time we may be grateful if at times the sociologist is not too stiffly scientific and wanders off into bits of reporting which have some literary characteristics. In his article, "Sociology and the Black Belt", in *THE AMERICAN REVIEW* of December, 1934, Mr. John Crowe Ransom noted this tendency in connection with a book by Professor Charles S. Johnson. Mr. Raper also has such inadvertent moments, or perhaps at times deliberately indulges himself, so that we get a little of the flavor of life in Macon County. For example:

A Negro wage hand bought a plug of Taylor's special tobacco and a plug of Brown Mule. He put the latter in his pocket with no wrapping on it. "There is always more chewers than buyers," he said, "so I always has some cheap backer loose in my pocket—it takes less when it's been sweated on."

But these moments are few. For the most part Mr. Raper is engaged in plain, very solemn analysis and presentation. On that ground, then, it is necessary to meet him. Since he insists on ponderable measurements, what is his standard for measuring? How does he apply it to the matters which he groups under such headings as "Planes of Living", "Man-Land Relations", "Population Movements", "The New Deal", and so on?

A difficulty at once arises. It is hard to tell whether this sociologist has a uniform standard, since in one paragraph he may be a hard-headed pragmatist and in the next a soft-headed humanitarian idealist. Now he is a scientist, content merely to heap up, under classified headings, mountains of fact about population trends or housing conditions; but now he is an advocate, hurling thunderbolts of opinion over his mountains of fact. At one moment he deals with tangible matters like health and income; at another, he has gone adventuring among "attitudes".

In this respect Mr. Raper is like some other sociologists who explore things contemporary and near at hand. His anxiety to get quick results from his findings is greater than his discriminating desire to see just what he has found. The Macon County people are not away off yonder like Margaret Mead's Samoans. They are only two or three hours' ride from Mr. Raper's Atlanta office. The temptation to chide them and make social prescriptions for them is irresistible. It is obvious that Mr. Raper's attitude toward such temptation must at best be described as coyly yielding rather than sternly ascetic. But when one searches about to discover him in the act of pronouncing the

gospel word of salvation, one finds him committed to nothing very precise. We must learn by implication what standard of life, material and nonmaterial, Mr. Raper wants the Macon Countians to measure up to.

There are hints of the standard in passages like the following:

The city's working family has advantages unknown to the farm tenant, such as public hospitalization, public outdoor nurse service, public clinics, and public school facilities infinitely superior to those provided in the rural section where many of the white and practically all the Negro children attend one-teacher schools.

And more hints in this passage:

Though one Negro farmer in Macon has a windmill which pumps water into his yard and barn, not one in either county has a cotton gin, peanut picker, tractor, saw-mill, Delco light plant, or stationary gasoline engine. Just as the work not done by power-driven machinery must be done by work animals, that not done by work animals must be done by members of the farm family.

It is clear from such observations, as from much else in the book, that Mr. Raper looks at the Macon County scene through urban eyes. He has an urban standard, or, more than that, the standard of an urban center which has the means and inclination to go a long way towards "socializing" medicine, education, and perhaps more besides. He does not in his own mind concede that there are or ought to be any great differences, inherent in the two situations, between city life and country life today. At the utmost he will concede only a difference of *Machinery*. He thinks

of a farm as a well-capitalized investment that uses tractors instead of steam cranes.

Where did he get such a standard and the "attitude" that goes with it? Not from Macon County, by any means. Not from the South, where by no means all the individual white cotton farmers can afford a great deal of power-driven machinery or find it, in all cases, necessary to success. Mr. Raper is not estimating a Southern situation in Southern terms. He is divesting himself of his Southern bias, if he has any, and is substituting, not the pure objectivity that we should expect, but a different kind of bias.

What bias this is can be seen from the agitation to which Mr. Raper gives way whenever he comes up against the problem of race relations. It appears in his repeated insistence that the Negro, particularly the Negro cropper, renter, and wage hand, suffers from some causeless, totally irrational "exploitation" at the hands of the white planter and the plantation system. Witness the following passage:

The Emancipation Proclamation by no means eradicated distinctions felt by both Negroes and whites, nor did it change the paradoxical feelings of affection and devotion which have always existed between many members of both races, as is shown in the following incidents.

"Stand up! Stand up! Can't you see it's a white man?" stormed a stout Negro woman to her pupils when she answered a knock at the schoolhouse door and saw a white man there. Bewildered, the visitor asked the children to sit down—he had little expected such obsequiousness, even in Greene County.

The clue to Mr. Raper's bias is in the word *para-*

doxical. Why should the affection be paradoxical? Why should the unnamed white visitor be bewildered? The "feelings of affection" and the manners here called "obsequious" are commonplace in the plantation South, as Mr. Raper well knows. In consideration of the business that he is about, we could understand his trying to suppress his own Southern viewpoint, but why can he not state the facts without coloring them? A physicist does not say that the magnet *paradoxically* attracts the iron filings!

Sometimes Mr. Raper notes an isolated fact without comment, in such a way as might invite a false generalization, as, for example, when he says: "In another field there was a thirteen-year-old boy with a hoe; he had been hoeing seven years." The instance suggests some rather brutal and debilitating form of child labor, but a boy hoeing in Macon County should suggest no such generalization. Agricultural tasks are in many cases not too complicated or arduous to be undertaken, without harm, by children, and they change with the seasons. This boy did not hoe the year round, he did not hurt himself a-hoeing, he probably loafed more than he worked. If he had been a cotton-mill worker, Mr. Raper's concern might have been justified.

He is equally naïve, or assumes naïveté, over methods of cultivation in Macon County. The methods are "primitive", for the farms are not "mechanized". Laborers chop cotton with a hoe and pick cotton by hand. The land is scarcely ever turned with two-horse plows. It is "a one-horse civilization". But Mr. Raper omits to note that the deft and special process of chopping cotton — in which thinning, weeding,

cultivating, and replanting go on together — can only be done efficiently with a hoe. It is just as if Mr. Raper should say of Cousin Roderick: "Look, how primitive! The man chews with his teeth!" As for cotton picking by hand — the mechanical cotton picker, of which elsewhere Mr. Raper has a doubtful word to say, is justly viewed with scepticism in the Southeast. And possibly the very up-to-date farmers in Macon County do not more often use the two-horse plow simply because the two-horse plow is not needed except in special cases. Their soil is loose and sandy. Where it has been frequently cultivated it can almost be turned with a stick.

Elsewhere is another kind of thing — a subtle suggestion, a slight alteration in emphasis. Mr. Raper does not say that relations between the two races are generally peaceful, partly because the white man, after long experience with the Negro, is indulgent toward him, thinking him to be a less responsible person than a white man. Mr. Raper, instead, says this:

The general peaceful relations between the two races in these counties rest, to no small degree, *upon the Negro's acceptance* of a role in which he is neither moral nor immoral—just nonmoral; neither saint nor sinner—just a rowdy; neither deceitful nor trustworthy, just lazy and easygoing; neither slave nor free man, just a "nigger". (Italics mine.)

The phrase italicized changes completely the usual emphasis — as John Brown of Ossawatimie once changed it. Possibly I may be reading into this and other passages a meaning not intended to be there. I should be glad to be proved wrong. But Mr. Raper's

bias is inescapable. One finds it in still more astonishing outline in the bits of historical interpretation with which he garnishes his analyses — or in the items of historical interpretation that he neglects to put in.

The major theme of the book is the “decay” of the plantation system, and the consequent effect of this “decay” upon the land and the people. At the outset Mr. Raper speaks of the collapse of the plantation system and attributes this to “its exploitation of soil and labor”. Later on, after a harangue in which he indicts the “landed oligarchy” for disfranchising the Negro, for opposing (he says) Negro education, and for holding the Negro “irredeemably inferior”, he makes the following summary:

Such are the rationalizations and defense mechanisms which the controllers of the plantation system have fabricated into a philosophy which justifies and maintains the politically sterile “Solid South”, and its outmoded agricultural structure based upon the human relations of a disintegrating feudalism.

The assumptions and sanctions of the plantation system have their price, and Greene and Macon counties have paid with one-crop farming, excessive erosion and depleted soil, low incomes for shifting landless workers, frequent bankruptcies for owners, emigration, and, most devastating of all, human relations built upon the idea that the vast majority of the population — the landless, whether white or Negro — are incapable of self-direction.

But before considering this summary, we should consider a really extraordinary passage in which Mr. Raper, while omitting any substantial reference to what went on in Reconstruction times, attributes the post-bellum “exploitation” of the Negro and the

slogan of "white supremacy" to some strange, insane desire to find a "scapegoat":

They [the planters] were in need of each other's constant sympathy. For their loss of property and power at home and prestige abroad they compensated partially by much talking and theorizing among themselves about the superiority of the Southern whites. They and their less refined successors — money-lenders and time merchants — have provided a white supremacy manifesto for the racial determinists of the South.

The various grievances of the Southern whites were heaped upon the inarticulate ex-slave; the white South's humiliation and poverty, its hatred of the Yankees and of the central government, along with its fears of the blacks, found a convenient scapegoat in the nominally free but defenseless Negro. And there, upon the back of the black man, most of the load has remained; for many politicians in government and business and religion have found the agitation of the race question the surest road to election.

One ought, I suppose, to be charitable with the errors of a man of Mr. Raper's earnestness and ability. But how can charity hold out against such garblings and wild imaginings? It would be charitable to say that Mr. Raper must have derived his knowledge of history from that eminent mythologizer, V. F. Calverton, or from Carl Carmer's journalistic slush. Such frenzied caricature takes us back to the days of the South-haters: Secretary Stanton, Ben Butler, and the oratorical Bob Ingersoll who thundered, in the election campaign of 1876: "Every man that shot down Union soldiers was a Democrat. . . . Every man that raised bloodhounds to pursue human

beings was a Democrat. . . . Shall the solid South . . . unified by assassination and murder, a South solidified by the shotgun — shall the solid South with the aid of a divided North control this great and splendid country?" Is it this kind of reckless anger that drives Mr. Raper to such distortions? Not even the most partisan of historians has ever made himself ridiculous by charging that Southern planters wreaked their baffled rage upon the Negro because there was nobody else feeble enough for them to be revenged upon.

It is hard to straighten out the general muddle and find the leading ideas and logical connections as they must exist in Mr. Raper's mind. There seem to be two main motifs, the economic and the social, and the chain of reasoning goes about like this. First, the plantation system has failed economically simply because it is a plantation system and for no other reason. Its faults have been inherent, all of them. No external causes have had anything to do with its decadence. And, second, the bad social conditions have something to do with a dervish-like trance to which Mr. Raper thinks the planters, out of motives of pure spite against the black man and the Yankee, have worked themselves up, and kept themselves worked up, unremittingly, for about seventy years. In this uncouth trance induced by their assumptions, rationalizations, and sanctions, they slash out at all and sundry, and do not mind cutting themselves to pieces in the process if they can only give full expression to their religious mania and, above all, revenge themselves upon the Negro.

If Southern planters had ever had the sharp ani-

mus toward the Negro that Mr. Raper describes, the northward, cityward emigration of the Negro would have started seventy years ago, and Macon County would now be devoid of Negro inhabitants, as are many of the mountain counties of Georgia and other states. If Mr. Raper thinks that the planters "keep down" the Negro by some complicated exercise of Machiavellian cunning, he is badly off the track. It would be nearer the actual sociological truth to say that something like the old master-slave relation hangs on merely because both races are used to it and like it. That sort of truth in the Macon County situation really deserves some sociological study of the sort that Mr. Raper has not even attempted; it would make an interesting contrast with the situation, say, in Chicago, St. Louis, Harlem, Arkansas. As for white supremacy, that is another social truth (it may be sociological too) which merits some honest contemplation, of a sort to which Mr. Raper has evidently not devoted himself. White supremacy has been used as a bogus political issue by a few charlatans, whose importance is negligible. But it has also been at times a real political issue — a veritable matter of life and death, indeed, when the course of events forced Southerners to consider on what terms a white South could survive at all. It first became a political issue because of pressure external to the South. It has not been a serious political issue for a long time, but it will again become just that if external pressure again makes it an issue.

And what of Mr. Raper's tremendous simplifications with regard to the plantation system in the role of destroyer? Here Mr. Raper's errors are less vicious,

if not to some degree excusable, for the system has bulked out prominently in many discussions, shallow and wise, and, like all well-established institutions, it is always getting blamed for sins of which it is not necessarily guilty.

If erosion and soil depletion are to be attributed to the inherent faults of the plantation system, and if small ownership will stop it, what of the small owners' places in the upper Tennessee Valley, where there is no plantation system at all? According to the TVA, small ownership there has not checked erosion and soil depletion. Nor has it done so in many other regions. In Middle Tennessee I can point out many a ruined field, not a part of a plantation system. And if bankruptcy, low incomes, and so forth are bodily secretions of the plantation system, why have the same phenomena appeared in all non-plantation agricultural areas, almost without exception?

Mr. Raper fails to distinguish between good farming and bad farming. He also fails to see that the disabilities of the plantation are also in some degree the disabilities of agriculture at large. He not only gives us a faulty interpretation of his facts, but he fails to gather all the relevant facts.

In his tale of the two Georgia counties he should have told how the survival of the plantation system is a consequence of the repossession of the Deep South by Southerners after the attempt to treat it as a conquered province had ceased. The post-bellum form of the plantation system, with its various relations between owner and tenant, was and is nothing more than a practical adjustment, an attempt to "carry on" within the Union, a product of defeat and reconcile-

ment, not of a conspiracy against the Negro. All this is clearly set forth in many books, notably in Rupert Vance's recent *Human Factors in the Cotton Culture*. But now, instead of Abolitionism, the plantation faces the subtler forces of Industrialism, which, while it holds out seemingly great rewards in the shape of markets, really sets the planter, as a producer of low-priced raw materials, at a great disadvantage as it renders him more and more a consumer of high-priced manufactured articles. The planter is in effect a colonial at the mercy of an imperialist. It is the imperializing industrialist who is ultimately to blame for the lowering of the tenant's status which Mr. Raper calls exploitation. The planter has been forced to adopt a cash relationship toward his tenants, and it is really not altogether his fault, or the fault of his system, that the cash relationship has not for a long time been bounteous.

Mr. Raper has nothing to say about such matters. He does not discourse upon the economic dependency of the South, although his contemporaries, Mr. Vance and Mr. Odum, have made much of it. In *Southern Regions* we may find that the Southeast, with about 21 per cent of the nation's population, has only 9 per cent of the nation's income. Mr. Raper does not consider the role of the tariff, of foreign markets, of world prices *vs.* domestic prices in the cotton economy. He does not instruct us in the matter of how recent increases in taxation have helped to drive Southern agriculture down hill, although Mr. Odum has collected figures to show that the largest percentages of tax increase in the nation have occurred in the Southeast. And there is also the new "high stand-

ard of living", which is to be figured in the same decline.

It is true that in his chapter, "The Exodus", Mr. Raper tells of enormous areas that have been sold for taxes or have fallen into the hands of loan companies. By 1934 or thereabouts, 17,000 acres in Greene County and about 20,000 in Macon County had been taken over by loan companies. In Green County the John Hancock Life Insurance Company had become the largest single landowner. But Mr. Raper considers these figures only in relation to Negro migration and the operation of the New Deal. In general his economic facts fail to get a broad and realistic interpretation. He cannot relate the shabbiness of tenant houses to the glorious upsurge of the Empire State Building or realize that the thirty or forty cents a day paid to the Negro wage hand may, in a sense, represent what is left when tribute has been paid to Detroit, Wall Street, and the American Federation of Labor.

These failures of interpretation grow out of Mr. Raper's predilections and his specialized sense of injustice. I should never want to fall into his error and say that such failures are inherent in sociology as a system. But sociologists, absorbed in their abstractions, sometimes do not realize how their great structures of fact may be invalidated by wrong assumptions. And that is the moment when sociology becomes dangerous. We must respect the sociologist when he is giving us real facts upon good assumptions, or perhaps upon no assumptions. For then, if his facts should prove to be in error, they can be corrected. But when his factual presentation is linked with false assumptions, he is not presenting facts at all; he is mythologiz-

ing. And it is extremely difficult to correct myths, all the more when they come to us in the disguise and with the great prestige of science. The whole thing is summed up in Blake's aphorism:

*A truth that's told with bad intent
Beats all the lies you can invent.*

Out of the same cause as the failure of interpretation arises also a failure of vision. Mr. Raper does not see, or certainly he leaves out, some of the pertinent facts. He has no urge to go a-sociologizing among the planters themselves. He is credulous toward the Negro point of view and skeptical toward the planter's point of view, and lets it alone. That is probably one reason why he fails to tell us that there is a marked difference between plantations, some being, let us say, good agrarian plantations, others being speculative, commercial, almost industrial. And there are many other little items about the housing, clothing, feeding, fueling, and doctoring of Negro tenants that he passes over lightly or simply omits.

What did Mr. Raper intend *Preface to Peasantry* to be: a sociological study, upon which, after mature verification, social changes might be based; or the program itself of social change, with supporting argument and evidence? If he intended the former, he has injured a valuable and ambitious study by being doctrinaire and emotional. This is a pity, for Mr. Raper is a good writer, and there are few books of sociology, in this special field, that are as lucid and systematic as his book is. But invariably, somewhere in the course of his smooth and matter-of-fact exposition, the cool

pointing finger of the expositor suddenly becomes the clenched fist of the propagandist. Thus, at the end of an admirable discussion of the status of churches, white and Negro, one is told that "the churches of both races are doubtless no more materially handicapped by economic conditions than they are paralyzed by race dogmas which rest upon the premise that Negroes are something less than normal human beings. Though they have adjusted their theology and philosophy to include their racial dogmas, the rural whites dislike to be faced with the Negro question, and but few of them can discuss local race conditions without some show of excitement, or resentment, or even rage." And neither can Mr. Raper forget his own dogma, blended as it is with his militant humanitarianism, nor can he quite stifle his own rage.

Is the book then a program? It is. Or rather it is two programs. One, the program of small ownership implied in the title of the book, though its practicality is doubtful in Macon County, is a program openly offered, and in line with the new tendency to apply such a remedy to regions weakened by a high percentage of tenancy. The second program, nowhere openly avowed, but continually hinted in scattered outbursts and frequent innuendoes, can hardly look toward anything else than a radical change in the Negro's social status and a resounding attack upon the South's bi-racial system, with its firmly established discriminations and segregations. What else can be implied in Mr. Raper's indignation at Negro disfranchisement, at the separateness of white and Negro in public institutions, at the workings of "white supremacy" and Negro "obsequiousness"? Mr. Raper would

remedy discrimination against Negro relief projects by seeing that the Negro is represented on county boards and school boards. He regards the spread of automobile ownership with satisfaction, for the following reasons: the Negro tenant who owns an automobile, no matter how ramshackle, learns about machinery; the car entitles him to half the road, no matter who is coming on the other half; it sets him free to roam incognito and uncommanded; it affords him an escape from "the irritations of the unequal transportation facilities provided by train and bus and plane". Such references, with the never-ending emphasis upon the inequality of Negro circumstances as compared with white, the ironical reiteration of such phrases as "the poorest folk work the the richest land", and the large display of photographs carefully selected to contrast plantation house with meanest cabin and splendid white school with most wretched Negro school — all this leaves little doubt that Mr. Raper's hopes, prayers, and designs look beyond a simple advocacy of an ownership program to lift the Negro out of mere economic debasement.

The "peasantry" to which Mr. Raper thinks the decay of the plantation system is a preface is the base for a general manoeuvre, the object of which is apparently to set the Negro up as an equal, or at least more than a subordinate member of Southern society. The second, or unavowed, program is the new form of abolitionism, again proposing to emancipate the Negro from the handicaps of race, color, and previous condition of servitude. It seizes upon small ownership for purposes of rationalization and, neglecting all else, offers it as a panacea. Once the panacea was

simply the abolition of slavery. But when the pure principle of emancipation failed to solve the problem, the right of suffrage was added. When suffrage also failed, education became the universal panacea, and after that, interracial committees. The new fashion calls for small ownership.

Let us grant that Mr. Raper's sympathy with the lot of the Negro is admirable. But an entirely admirable interest in Negro welfare, which many Southerners would share with him, leads him to extremes. If small ownership by Negroes means what Mr. Raper apparently wants it to mean, it is unattainable as long as the South remains the South, or is to be attained only at such a cost as would make Mr. Raper out to be not a sympathetic but a ruthless person.

But is small ownership for Negroes practicable, in a more modest sense, as a program aimed simply at improving the economic position of the Negro tenant? In some parts of the South, yes. But, even if we grant the competence of the Negro as owner and the willingness of the Federal government to provide long-time loans for such a purpose, there is still a reasonable doubt that the scheme could be worked out on a considerable scale in a typical plantation region of the Deep South. Aside from other obstacles, the great and insuperable obstacle is the large excess of Negro population. To establish large numbers of Negro owners on good land would result in the ultimate eviction of white owners. These would be evicted either directly, by a process of purchase and government subsidy, or indirectly, through a process of competition, like that by which the Japanese peasant infiltrated into California. The bad race relations

brought about by the coming of the Japanese peasant, who had a low standard of living, into a region of white farmers who had a high standard of living, indicate what would happen if such a competitive element ever became a part of the plantation scene. Race relations would be worse, not better. Nor would such irritating competition be eliminated by the conversion of Negro tenants into Negro owners to a degree moderate enough to establish a relative scarcity of tenant labor and so, as Mr. Raper hints, to raise the wage scale. What would then happen is shown by what happened in the South under the NRA: white owners, obliged to pay more wages, would turn to white labor. Thus another serious cause of friction would be created. It is indeed already a potential cause of friction in Macon County, where distant loan companies have imported white Alabamians from the uplands to farm lands they have taken over.

Yet Negro ownership is practicable and, in fact, already exists in regions of the South where the Negro population is a minority. Or, as Mr. Raper notes, it may well occur even in Greene and Macon counties where circumstances may be specially favorable to it, and may have good effects. But it has good effects and may occur only where Negro ownership does not imply disturbance of the time-honored economic arrangements and social conventions which have resulted from the gradual adjustment of both races to the artificial, difficult, post-Civil War situation.

What the solution of the race problem may be, who knows? Maybe there is no possibility of a solution unless the American people can some day bring themselves to define a place for the American Negro

as special as that which they have defined for the American Indian. Certainly the Negro derives no benefit from being a bone of contention, flung passively hither and thither. The Negro's acceptance (which so piques Mr. Raper) of the rôle the South has given him would seem to indicate that he prefers an inferior status, if it be real, to being a bone.

The general Southern view would be, I imagine, that any program of agrarian reform which really helps the farmer will also help the Negro tenant. Everybody knows that the tenant needs help. And everybody with sense knows that programs of agrarian reform must proceed with due regard for the special conditions of regions and localities.

Such measures cannot begin on the assumption that the plantation is a useless anachronism in Macon County, about to collapse of its own inherent rottenness. Elsewhere that assumption might apply. Even before the sixties there were regions of the South where the plantation, especially the large plantation, represented a temporary agricultural phase and often was, indeed, an economic monstrosity. From such regions the plantation has long since vanished. But in Macon County, as in regions of the same general character, the plantation has shown singular vitality. The very fact that it has survived, even through periods of terrible agricultural disability, should lead the social scientist to ask whether it may not be specially adapted to its local situation and should not, therefore, constitute a notable exception to the general and widespread necessity of remedying agricultural disability by checking tenancy and distributing ownership more widely.

In so far as Mr. Raper's book may direct attention to the need of agrarian reform and so, by that means, may improve the Negro's lot, it will accomplish good and will, as I said at the beginning, get results. But in Macon County Mr. Raper has obtusely chosen the worst possible example to sustain his own argument. The more I think of the months that I spent in the land of Eden, the more incredible it seems that Mr. Raper ever came there to illustrate his thesis, or, having been there, could continue to argue it. In the part of Macon County around Marshallville, to which Mr. Raper devotes no special attention, are some of the best farmers in America, and certainly some of the best plantations in Georgia. By contrast certain other parts of Georgia seem a waste land of ruined fields and human unhappiness. I should not have been surprised to find the Marshallville region cited as an object lesson for those who might be interested in knowing whether a plantation system could justify itself. The planters of that region, despite the old dominance of cotton and a none too happy excursion into peach-growing, have practised for years all the farming methods now so much talked about: diversification, contour-plowing, terracing, soil-building, crop rotation. They have even tried cooperative marketing and small industry. They have a good deal of the old, self-sufficient, agrarian tradition. Such methods, administered by a kindly and generous people, have made that little area, relatively speaking, an Eden. If a sociologist makes it out to be a Hell, then that sociologist had better begin to sociologize himself, for there is something wrong with him.